

World Day Against Child Labour

12 June 2007



Migrant families, child labour and child trafficking in agriculture

Migrant labour is a regular feature of agriculture especially during peak times such as harvesting. Migrant workers are found in all types of employment relationships as casual, temporary, seasonal or even full-time workers. They may be migrant workers from a different part of a country, or foreign workers. Wherever they come from, migrant workers are always heavily disadvantaged in terms of pay, health and safety, social protection, housing and medical protection.

It is common practice among migrant, seasonal and temporary agricultural workers to include children as part of a family work unit, particularly where schooling or childcare is unavailable or unaffordable. In these circumstances, children begin to work with their parents from an early age and are unable to attend school. On farms and plantations, children often work alongside their parents for task-based or piece-rated remuneration, but they are not formally hired and do not figure on the payroll. Usually, the earnings of the whole family are listed under the name of the male head of household, who is the only one "employed".

The children of migrant workers are often classified as "helpers" though they do similar and as strenuous work as adults. Equally, they may be hired through contractors, sub-contractors, or team leaders, thus enabling farm and plantation owners to deny responsibility for knowing the ages of the children or the terms under which they were hired. Because work done by these children is not recognized, nor easily recorded in statistics, it goes largely unnoticed.

For many migrant families, the output produced by the children is essential for earning a living wage. For example, a study by the *Eliminating Child Labour in Tobacco Foundation*

found that on tobacco estates in Malawi, 78 per cent of children between 10 and 14 years of age work either full time or part time with their parents. One in five children less than 15 years old worked full time and a similar number worked part time. Children are usually not employed directly on the estates but work to fill quotas as part of a tenant family: without the child labour, the family cannot meet the quota. In an ILO study on commercial agriculture in South Africa, children on some farms were actually required to work if they wished to live with their parents.

Children of migrant families who work alongside their parents may have been accompanying them to the fields from infancy. Very young children are often brought to the fields because there is little accessible, affordable day care in rural areas. Though not working, these infants, toddlers and young children are exposed to many of the same workplace hazards as their parents. Child labour in this type of setting is also a childcare issue. Furthermore, a report on child labour in US agriculture noted that whilst childcare is generally not available in many agricultural areas, ironically, in some areas where day care centres do exist, they are located immediately adjacent to fields and are readily contaminated with over-spray from pesticide applications.

In addition to children migrating with their families, there are widespread reports of forced labour on agricultural plantations that affect children from elsewhere who are not with their parents. In 2002, a study of child labour on some 1,500 cocoa-producing farms in *Cameroon*, the *Côte d'Ivoire*, *Ghana* and *Nigeria* found that hundreds of thousands of children were engaged in hazardous tasks on cocoa farms. Many child labourers came from impoverished countries in

the region like *Burkina Faso*, *Mali* and *Togo*. Parents often sold their children in the belief they would find work and send earnings home. However, once removed from their families, the boys were forced to work in slave-like conditions. In the *Côte d'Ivoire* alone, nearly 12,000 of the child labourers had no relatives in the area, suggesting they were trafficked.

The situation in *Côte d'Ivoire* triggered a public commitment by companies in the global cocoa/chocolate supply chain to address the problems, as most conspicuously demonstrated by the Cocoa Industry Protocol, the International Cocoa Initiative, and the Cocoa Certification and Verification System. Anecdotal evidence from various other countries suggests child trafficking into other types of plantations (such as coffee and rice farms, tea estates and palm oil production farms). Further research is needed to determine the magnitude and scope of child trafficking into these other types of plantations – with a view to developing effective responses.

International Labour Organisation (ILO)

International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)

www.ilo.org/childlabour

